

THREE ONE ACT PLAYS


BY

MARY KATHARINE REELY

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*BOSTON*

WALTER H. BAKER COMPANY



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# THREE ONE-ACT PLAYS

DAILY BREAD  
A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH ✓  
THE LEAN YEARS ✓

By  
MARY KATHARINE REELY



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WALTER H. BAKER COMPANY  
1924

# Three One-Act Plays

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## FOREWORD

Daily life is in Miss Reely's plays—daily routine, daily crises. She has that for lack of which many a play of admirable material perishes: emotional appeal. One cannot even read these plays without being stirred to response, to definite participation. They deal with problems rooted in human emotions. "Daily Bread" must move everyone, but especially the socially awake. "A Window to the South" must challenge all human sympathy, but especially that of women, and especially that of rural women, farm women. Home, labor, love, pioneering, such interests speak and throb in the little plays. Miss Reely is a discovery.

—ZONA GALE.

**DAILY BREAD**  
**A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH**  
**THE LEAN YEARS**

may be performed under the following conditions:  
The royalty on these three plays is ten dollars for every performance to which admission is charged, or five dollars when there is no admission.

**RURAL ROYALTY**

For rural communities the offer is made to permit the plays to be given without royalty on condition that some group or person plant in the community a roadside fruit tree; or else contribute in some definite way to community consciousness and community development.

The royalty on each play is payable to the publishers, Walter H. Baker Company, 41 Winter Street, Boston, Mass.

## DAILY BREAD

*"All life moving to one measure—  
Daily bread, daily bread—"*

—W. W. GIBSON.

## CHARACTERS

JOHN BOYD.

MRS. BOYD.

ALICE.

MRS. SCHULTZ, *a neighbor.*

MISS DAVIS, *a friendly visitor.*

## DAILY BREAD

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SCENE.—*The Boyds' kitchen-living room, in a four-family tenement in a mid-western city. It is a home of clean, respectable poverty. The room is furnished with a cook stove, table that is partly set, ready for a meal, a high bureau which stands against the rear wall, and several chairs. The door which opens onto the hallway is at the upper right.*

MRS. BOYD, *a slight, quick-moving woman, is humming softly as she busies herself about the room. Hurrying to the cook stove, she takes the lid off a stew kettle, sniffs, nods her head and smiles with the air of one well pleased. The outer door opens.*

MRS. BOYD.

[*Over her shoulder.*] Is it you, Allie? [ALICE, *a thin-shouldered little girl of about thirteen, enters with her school books. ALICE sniffs.*] Don't it smell good?

[ALICE *walks over to the stove, lifts the lid off the kettle.*

ALICE.

Why, it's real old Irish stew, Ma!

MRS. BOYD.

Indeed, and that's what it is.

## DAILY BREAD

ALICE.

With meat!

MRS. BOYD.

Sure, for it's good and hungry your Pa will be when he gets home from his job.

ALICE.

[*Taking off her cap and gray sweater and dropping her books on the table.*] It's nice to have Pa with a job again, isn't it, Ma?

MRS. BOYD.

Indeed it is! And wasn't he the proud man, going off to his work this morning! [*Glancing at clock on bureau.*] He'll be late coming home, I'm thinking. It's a long walk from the mills, and he'll be thinking he can't spend the nickel for carfare—him having been out of work so long. Where's the boys—they're late.

ALICE.

They went to the Settlement for their gym class. [*Opening one of her school books.*] Ma, dear, I brought home my report card. [*Offering it shyly.*]

MRS. BOYD.

[*Wiping her hands on her apron. Running her finger down the card, she half murmurs to herself.*] Excellent—Excellent—Reading, Excellent—Spelling, Excellent—Arithmetic—Why, Alice, darlin', you're falling off here! You're only getting a mark of Good in your 'rithmetic, when by rights you ought to have Excellents in all of 'em. [*Suddenly*

## DAILY BREAD

*taking the girl's thin cheeks between her hands.]*  
You darling! It's a great scholar you are, and it's a proud man your Pa will be when he comes home from his work, and sees this! Put it up now on the bureau, so's he can see it first thing when he comes in and sign his name to it. It's so pleased he is that he can keep you in school till you graduate—now that he has his job.

*[Mrs. BOYD goes back to the stove where she busies herself. ALICE places the card on the bureau.]*

ALICE.

I met Miss Davis down the street. She said maybe she'd stop in. She was awfully pleased that Pa went to his job this morning.

MRS. BOYD.

Well, it's through her, bless her, that he has a job to go to.

ALICE.

She says it's a good place to work—the mills. They treat you right there.

MRS. BOYD.

Well of course the pay ain't what your Pa's been used to—but it's better than nothing these days—and he was glad to get it, poor man, having been out of work so long.

ALICE.

You won't be going with Mrs. Schultz now, will you, Ma?

## DAILY BREAD

Mrs. BOYD.

No, not now, Allie. You might be setting the plates around, dear. Not but what I'd be glad to go—with a few nights' work we could get caught up again—but your Pa don't like the idea. He's sort of old-fashioned in his notions, your Pa—"It's a poor man that can't support his own family," he says—but God save us, what's a man going to do these times if he can't get a job! 'Tain't his fault, poor dear!

ALICE.

Just the same, I'm glad you're not going out, Ma. I'd hate for you to take to night scrubbing like Mrs. Schultz. Maybe I could get a job, Ma, then you wouldn't need to. Next month I'll be fourteen. I could get a permit.

Mrs. BOYD.

Now, now, child, don't you talk about getting a job! You with that fine report card! Well, God be praised we don't neither of us need to be talking of work now that your Pa has his job. Hark! Is that himself so soon?

[*Hastens to the door. There are voices outside. One (MISS DAVIS) calls out as Mrs. BOYD opens the door.*]

MISS DAVIS.

What am I going to do about it, Mrs. Boyd? I was coming in to see you and here's Mrs. Schultz saying I owe her a call!

## DAILY BREAD

MRS. BOYD.

Sure and you'll both come in and pay me a visit together. Come in, Mrs. Schultz.

MISS DAVIS.

[*Appearing at the door. She is a good-looking young woman, dressed in a stylish but plain and businesslike suit.*] How are you, Mrs. Boyd? Hello, Alice. [MRS. SCHULTZ, *a large stolid-looking woman follows her into the room. Both visitors sniff the air.*] Um! Something good!

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Onions!

MRS. BOYD.

It's the stew, ready for his supper when he comes home from his work.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

So your man's working again. I seen him going off this morning. [*Seats herself heavily in a chair near the table.*] I just been out for a few rolls to eat with my coffee before I go to my work. [*To MRS. BOYD.*] So you won't be coming along now?

MRS. BOYD.

No, not now. He wouldn't like it—and of course it isn't so necessary—now that he is working again. [*To MISS DAVIS.*] Thanks to you! Now lay off your coat, Miss Davis, and you, Mrs. Schultz. I'm going to make you a cup of tea. He won't be coming in for a while yet.

MISS DAVIS.

Oh, I can't stay. I've really got to run down to

## DAILY BREAD

Fourth Avenue to look up Annie Tierney—they say she's given up her place in the store and taken to running the streets again.

MRS. BOYD.

You don't say? Well, she was always a light headed little thing—and not having any training of any kind. But you can look her up to-morrow. I'm sure it's enough you've done for one day. Allie, dear, take Miss Davis's coat.

MISS DAVIS.

Mrs. Boyd, you spoil me! Never mind, dear, I'll put it here. [*Hangs coat over back of chair.*]

MRS. BOYD.

Now, Mrs. Schultz, lay off your coat.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Well, I don't mind if I do. Allie, put them rolls I brought out on a plate. We might as well all eat here together sociable like, eh, Miss Davis?

MRS. BOYD.

That's a fine idea.

[*ALICE takes the cinnamon rolls out of the bag and puts them on a plate. Brings cups.*]

MISS DAVIS.

I heard something about you, Alice.

ALICE.

Me?

## DAILY BREAD

MISS DAVIS.

Umph-um! Met Miss Mayberry.

ALICE.

[*With a little laugh.*] Oh!

MRS. BOYD.

Well, I guess it ain't anything very bad you'd be hearing about Alice from her teacher.

MISS DAVIS.

Oh, it might be worse—she says that Alice is a very promising pupil!

ALICE.

Just the same she gave me a scolding to-day.

MISS DAVIS.

[*With exaggerated seriousness.*] Alice, I'm ashamed of you.

MRS. BOYD.

And what were you doing to deserve a scolding, I'd like to know?

ALICE.

I didn't do anything.

MISS DAVIS.

[*Still assuming a very reproving manner.*] Now, Alice, that isn't true! You know you must have been doing something very naughty.

ALICE.

Well, we had clay modeling to-day, and I made a little clay man that Myrtle Burns thought very

## DAILY BREAD

funny, and she giggled, and then Miss Mayberry said: [*Imitating.*] Alice, I am surprised. I look to you to set a better example to the class. [*Giggles.*

MISS DAVIS.

Alice! If that's the way you spend your time in school, we'll have to—make an artist out of you!

MRS. BOYD.

[*Pouring the tea and handing about the cups.*] Well, if the teachers never had any more worry than what Alice gives them, they'd be having an easy time of it! With the boys now it is different.

MISS DAVIS.

Where are the boys?

MRS. BOYD.

Alice was saying they went over to the Settlement. They're late coming home.

MISS DAVIS.

Oh, yes; there's a basket ball game on to-night—no telling what time they'll be here. By the way, send Billy over Saturday afternoon. I have a job for him. Oberman, the florist, wants an extra boy to deliver—he'll pay fifty cents. I say, Mrs. Schultz, these things are awfully good.

[*Holding up a roll.*

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Yes, I usually buys them to eat with my coffee before I goes to my work. . . . Two of them makes a good meal.

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MISS DAVIS.

But, Mrs. Schultz, you ought to have something more nourishing—working the way you do.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Ach, don't you go worrying about me. I eat enough all right.

ALICE.

[*Who is hanging over the back of her mother's chair.*] But it isn't the amount you eat—it's the calories.  
[*She speaks very learnedly.*]

MRS. BOYD.

Listen to her!

MISS DAVIS.

Bright girl, Alice; we'll make a dietitian out of you.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Calories is it? Yes, I heard all about that all ready—at the Settlement. A lady was talking about what she call "calories,"—and I thought it was some kind of a vegetable, like carrots, or kohlrabi, maybe—but when she says a man should eat fourteen hundred or some such number a day! Ach, Himmel! I thinks, he'd bust!

[*ALICE giggles and the others laugh.*]

ALICE.

But, Mrs. Schultz, a calorie isn't something to eat, it's—it's—well, it's the food value in what you eat.

## DAILY BREAD

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Yes, I got that idea all right—it's something like these here germs they talk about. [ALICE and MISS DAVIS *are again convulsed.*] You know too much; [*Shaking her finger at ALICE.*] if you was my girl, you would go to work. You're old enough. First thing your Ma knows, you will up and get married—and then what good will she have of you?

MRS. BOYD.

Now, don't you be putting silly ideas in her head. Allie she isn't going to be thinking of work for a year or two yet.

MISS DAVIS.

We aren't going to let Alice go to work. Miss Mayberry wants her to go to the Vocational High School.

MRS. BOYD.

Yes, that's what her Pa would like, to send her on to high school—and now that he's working again—Have another cup, Miss Davis—wish I could offer you some of the stew, but it's got to be saved for himself—he'll be good and hungry, poor man that ain't had a decent meal for weeks. “What we can't pay for we won't have,” he says. And the boys will be good and hungry too, little tykes! It's been hard on them with never a bite of meat in the house. Us women folks do very well on bread and tea—but men, the poor dears, need feeding.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Well, I guess you're lucky you ain't got more to

## DAILY BREAD

feed. What would you do if you had six like I had? That's what I says to the lady over to the Settlement that talked about making what she called a "budget." You remember that already, Miss Davis? Showing us how to live on our incomes. She kept all the time talking about the "average American family." The average American family, she says, ought to live comfortable on \$1,200 a year. And I says to her, What is it, the average American family, I says. And, the average American family, she says, is a husband, a wife and three children. And I says to her, How about it when you got six? And she kind of didn't have nothing more to say.

MRS. BOYD.

Well, then, I've got the "Average American family," have I? So if I only had the \$1,200, I'd be all right! but I ain't been having it this year, by a long sight!

MISS DAVIS.

Well, that's all over now—now that Mr. Boyd is working again.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

I surely never had no twelve hundred neither when mine was growing—and when they was old enough to be a help, off they go and get married and start it all over again. It's foolishness I says to them. Now you got jobs for yourselves you got it pretty good. You go and get married and then your troubles begin. Any poor man that gets married and tries to raise a family is a fool, I says to them. But you can't talk sense to young people.

## DAILY BREAD

MISS DAVIS.

Now, Mrs. Schultz, you don't mean that. You're glad you had your children, you know you are.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Small comfort they ever was to me.

MRS. BOYD.

Sure and she don't mean it. She wouldn't give up her children any more than I would mine.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Did you feel that way last week and the week before that when your man had no work?

MRS. BOYD.

[*Thoughtfully.*] It is hard to see them do without—maybe it is better not to have them at all than it is to see them do without. And to take them away from their studies to put them to work for you.

ALICE.

[*Slipping up to her mother.*] Ma, dear, don't talk that way. You know I'd love to go to work for you.

MISS DAVIS.

But we needn't talk about that now, need we?

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Well, you take care of your children, and they should ought to turn around and do for you. Well, I must be off to my scrubbing. So you won't be coming along? I am sorry—Mrs. Atkins—her that's been working along with me on the top floor—has laid off. Her time is almost here.

## DAILY BREAD

MRS. BOYD.

Ah, the poor dear.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Working right up to the last minute almost,—you should not ought, I says to her—but what can she do? Her man's been sent up to the workhouse for vagrancy—and there's three others besides the one that's on the way.

MISS DAVIS.

She is horribly independent—she wouldn't have help.

MRS. SCHULTZ.

Well, I'm sorry you're not coming along. [*Puts on her coat.*] Any time you want a night's work—it's not so bad—them tile floors is easy to clean—only on the knees it is bad—well, so long.

MISS DAVIS.

Wait, I'll go with you.

MRS. BOYD.

Sure, dear, I wish you could wait and see him when he comes home—he'll want to tell you about his job—after your getting it for him and all.

MISS DAVIS.

[*ALICE helping her into her coat.*] I would like to see him—but then I know it's all right—He has a good place. I'm always glad when I get a man into the flour mills. You know, really I get awfully discouraged sometimes. So much of the work we

## DAILY BREAD

do seems trifling—but when I find a man a job, then I think I've done something!

*[A heavy step outside—a hand on the door.]*

MRS. BOYD.

It's himself! Alice, clear the table, fix his place. *[Instead of going to the door to meet him, she darts to the stove. The door opens—JOHN BOYD stands there. The four women look at him silently. He advances into the room.]* My God man—your job?

ALICE.

Pa, dear, sit down.

*[Pushes him toward a chair—he sinks into it, his hands, holding his hat, drooping between his knees.]*

MISS DAVIS.

*[With professional briskness.]* Mr. Boyd! What is it?

MRS. BOYD.

Man, dear—Is it your job?

JOHN BOYD.

*[Harshly.]* I've got no job!

MRS. BOYD.

*[Under her breath.]* My God!

MISS DAVIS.

Didn't they save the place for you? They promised. I'll call them up.

## DAILY BREAD

MRS. BOYD.

John, dear. Speak up. Tell us. Didn't they save the place? Tell Miss Davis. She'll fix it.

JOHN BOYD.

She can't.

MISS DAVIS.

I certainly can. I'll go and call up at once. They promised me the place. Mr. Sear himself promised. I'll go call him up now—at his house.

JOHN BOYD.

It's not him—it's me! It's me! Do you hear? I'm no good. I'm played out. There's no strength in me! [*Lifting his arm.*] Look at that! There's no strength in me arm!

MRS. BOYD.

But, man, man—of course, when you haven't had a decent meal in you for weeks—of course not—wait till you get some of this stew inside of you. Alice, bring a dish. John, dear, smell it—smell the good old Irish stew, with onions, John. To-morrow you'll be a new man—to-morrow you'll show them!

JOHN BOYD.

There'll be no to-morrow, I tell you! I'm laid off—laid off—laid off at three o'clock this afternoon—because I hadn't the strength in me arms to hold a shovel—here's another man in my place—a young man.

MRS. BOYD.

[*To MISS DAVIS.*] Can't you do something?

## DAILY BREAD

MISS DAVIS.

We'll do something to-morrow. We'll find something lighter. It's heavy work, shoveling wheat—something light till you get your strength back again. Now eat Mrs. Boyd's nice supper, and to-morrow come to see me.

JOHN BOYD.

[*Turning on her fiercely.*] What for? [*Looking away again hopelessly.*] She means well.

MISS DAVIS.

[*Trying not to lose her professional composure.*] Mrs. Boyd, send your husband—[*Looks at the hopeless figure and drops her confident pose.*] Send Billy over Saturday. I have a half day's work for him. [*Turns abruptly and goes out the door.*]

MRS. SCHULTZ.

[*Moving slowly after her. At the door.*] I'll be going to my work in ten minutes or so.

[*She speaks impersonally, addressing no one in particular.*]

MRS. BOYD.

Oh, yes. In ten minutes. [*The family is left alone—three desperately discouraged figures. Mrs. BOYD pulls herself together.*] Now John, dear, sit up to the table—Allie, bring a clean cup—and be having some of this nice stew—don't it smell good, John? Smell the onion—and there's carrots in it,

## DAILY BREAD

John—and potatoes—and the nice bit of meat, John. Think of that!

JOHN BOYD.

[*Lifting his head.*] Who's paying for it?

MRS. BOYD.

Well, you see, John, I got credit—I said I'd be paying on Saturday.

JOHN BOYD.

You said you had a man with a job. You said that you had a man that would earn money. Who's going to pay for it now?

MRS. BOYD.

Well, you see, John, it's like this. Mrs. Schultz, she's been after me. You don't know how that woman's been after me—pestering the life out of me. And it's for Mrs. Atkins, the poor dear that's been working with her—and she's laid off, poor thing, expecting her baby almost any day now—and it's to save the place for her. Think of it, John, the poor woman's been working right up to the last week—and it's to save the place, you see, till she's strong again—she needs it so bad with her husband in the Works and another mouth to be fed. Ain't it nice, John, we've only got three—the average American family. Here, John, is your stew. Now draw up and eat. Allie, bring your Pa his tea. So I gave in at last. Yes, I says to Mrs. Schultz, to save the place for her, I'll go. So you see it's a gay one I'm going to be—staying out till midnight, John. What do you know about that now? It's a fine easy place to work, Mrs. Schultz says—all tile floors

## DAILY BREAD

and no trick at all to clean—and good pay—a dollar seventy-five and carfare for just one evening—think of that, John. John, dear, taste that stew.

JOHN BOYD.

[*Dully.*] They turned me off at three o'clock with a dollar and a half.

MRS. BOYD.

And we'll be putting that away with the rent money. With what Billy will earn Saturday 'twill help a lot. Allie, dear, wrap up a clean apron for me. [*She fetches a shabby coat and hat.*]

JOHN BOYD.

Where are you going?

MRS. BOYD.

Why, John, darlin', I have been telling you. I'm going out with Mrs. Schultz to the cleaning. [*Going behind his chair, she pats his arm.*] You don't mind, John dear? It's going to be a great lark. Me that stays in the house so much! Think of seeing the inside of them big offices, John. You don't mind, darling?

JOHN BOYD.

[*Harshly.*] It don't matter. Nothing matters. I'm done for. I can't support my family. I'm done. I'm old—old.

MRS. BOYD.

[*Taking the paper parcel from ALICE.*] Listen to the man, and him just turned forty! But

## DAILY BREAD

John, dear, that is an old-fashioned notion you got. It's all the style now for married women to work—it's called being economically independent. I heard about it at the Settlement. Sure, John, you want your wife to be up-to-date. John, dear, eat your supper—it's getting all cold. [*Mrs. SCHULTZ opens the door—stands waiting.*] I'm all ready. [*She starts for the door—then looks with loving compassion at her husband.*] Oh, the dear man, he's taking it so hard. [*With a little bird-like flight she kisses him on the cheek.*] Man, dear. Man, dear. [*Turns away.*] Allie, darling, coax your Pa to eat. Say something to cheer him up. [*At the door.*] Allie, dear, show him your report card!

[*Nods at the happy thought and goes out, closing the door.*]

ALICE.

[*Looking wistfully at her father, speaks in imitation of her mother.*] Pa, dear. Eat your stew. Don't it smell good—don't the onions smell good? [*He makes no response. She looks discouraged at the failure of her first effort. Then she tiptoes over to the bureau and takes down her report card. With it clasped in her hands she advances slowly—wring to the heart by her father's grief, she flies to him, throws her arms around his neck.*] Pa, darlin', don't you take it that way, don't. Next month I can get a job, then it'll be all right—[*Murmuring, with her cheek against his.*] It will be all right.

[*The man's shoulders sink lower.*]

CURTAIN



# A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

Albion  
College  
Library

## CHARACTERS

HAT.

LUCY.

CHARLEY.

MA, *Mrs. Stockman.*

HANK.

PA, *Mr. Stockman.*

DOC HARNEY.

THE GREAT SPECIALIST.

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

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SCENE.—*A farm kitchen in the Middle West. At the right there is a small window and a door, screened, opening out onto a porch. At the left there is a door leading to the other rooms of the house. There is a kitchen range in the left upper corner. Near the center of the room the dinner table, covered with a red cloth, is partly set, ready for a meal. The back wall—the south wall of the kitchen—is conspicuously blank. The kitchen is spotlessly neat, but is dark, lighted as it is by the one window. HAT is working at the stove. LUCY is busy at the sink. They stand with their backs to the audience.*

HAT.

Look out again, Lucy, and see if Pa's in sight.

LUCY.

[*Turns about and looks at HAT, whose back is still turned. She is about to speak to her, then decides not to—turns sharply and goes to the door—with marked emphasis.*] No! your Pa is not in sight yet!

HAT.

Well, it ain't time for him yet, of course—only I thought he might be early.

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## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

LUCY.

And I s'pose when your Pa comes in early he expects dinner to be on the table ready for him!

HAT.

Oh, yes—of course—and that makes it kind of hard—because Pa likes his dinner hot.

LUCY.

Well, I don't wonder your Ma ——

*[Clips her mouth shut.]*

HAT.

*[Banging the oven door and turning about, mopping her face with her apron.]* What'd you say, Lucy?

LUCY.

Nothing.

HAT.

It's awful hot.

LUCY.

It's a hot day to be baking biscuits.

HAT.

Yes, but the bread give out last night and there wasn't time to bake a batch before dinner.

LUCY.

Hank went into town in the auto last night after binder twine—why didn't he bring out a couple of loaves?

HAT.

Bakers' bread! Pa never eats it—besides, buy bread?

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

LUCY.

Yes, buy bread! I should say so—weather like this! Ma never bakes any more in summer time—she says it doesn't pay for just two of 'em—so Pa brings out the bread in the morning when he drives in with the cream.

HAT.

[*With mingled scorn and wistfulness.*] Your Ma's always had it awful easy—but then I guess maybe that's why your Pa ain't ever got on ——

LUCY.

[*With rising anger.*] Got on! Got on! Well, I'd like to know where all your getting on's ever got you to!

HAT.

Ever got us to? Ain't Pa the biggest landowner in the county? Ain't he got the biggest barn? You just watch people driving by and see if they don't stop and point to it—"That's the biggest barn in Simpson County," they say. And ain't Pa giving all the boys a fine start? When Joe got married, didn't Pa start him out on three hundred acres, all under cultivation—and when Hank gets married ——

[*She stops and looks meaningly at LUCY—but LUCY keeps her back turned, very much occupied with her work. HAT takes another look into the oven.*]

LUCY.

[*Over her shoulder.*] Yes—how about when Hank gets married?

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

HAT.

Nothing—only I guess the girl that gets Hank will have it mighty lucky.

LUCY.

How do you mean—lucky?

HAT.

Well, I'll tell you, Lucy—it ain't generally known—but when Pa was away last Fall, he bought up a lot of wild land in the northern part of the state—couple of thousand of acres or so—and he's thinking of starting Hank up there ——

LUCY.

Up there! On wild land to be cleared! And the girl will be lucky!

HAT.

Yes—this was all wild land when Pa and Ma took it up—you wouldn't think it now, would you, by the looks of things?

LUCY.

[*Muttering to herself.*] Yes you would—by the looks of your Ma.

HAT.

What'd you say, Lucy? Them biscuits is almost done—and Pa not in sight yet. Tst! Tst! That's the worst of biscuits.

LUCY.

[*Throwing down her paring knife.*] Oh, for heaven's sake, Hat, take the biscuits out and let them

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

get cold! And let us go out and sit on the porch till the men come in!

HAT.

Oh, but Lucy,—we can't—and we got to get them apples ready for pickling, so's they can be cooking on top while the bread's baking—'twon't do to let the fire go to waste—besides, the apples won't keep another day. Here, I'll get another knife and help you.

LUCY.

[*Holding up a knotty, wormy apple.*] S'pose they did go to waste! Windfalls!

HAT.

Yes, of course they're windfalls—they won't sell, so we have to put 'em up. Ma's always been a great one to put up apple butter and things—but she's not feeling well this Fall—you folks done much canning this season?

LUCY.

Yes, Ma put up a crate of peaches.

HAT.

Peaches? Did you buy peaches to put up?

LUCY.

Yes—peaches! Ma likes 'em, so Pa bought 'em for her!

HAT.

Tst! Tst! No wonder you never got on!

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

LUCY.

Got on! Got on! Didn't I ask you where getting on ever got you to?

HAT.

But I told you ——

LUCY.

Yes, you told me about your Pa's barn—and what he could do for the boys—but what's getting on ever done for you and your Ma?

HAT.

Why—why—I don't know, Ma and I—well, anyway, I never had no call to go out to work!

LUCY.

You never had no call to go out to work! No, I guess no woman on this farm would ever have any call to go out to work! Hat, I'll tell you something—it's the luckiest thing that ever happened to me that I came over here to help out this harvest.

HAT.

Lucky? Why, Lucy?

LUCY.

Oh—because!

HAT.

[*Takes another peek at the screen door—then goes to the window.*] I don't know what you mean, Lucy.

LUCY.

How long has your Ma lived here, Hat?

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## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

HAT.

Why, ever since she's been married, I guess—  
Let's see, twenty-seven—twenty-eight years, I suppose —

LUCY.

An' I s'pose for twenty-eight years—365 days a year—three meals a day, your Ma has had to peek out of that little west window to see if your Pa was coming in!

HAT.

What made you say that, Lucy? About the window? [*She comes over and sits near LUCY.*] Have you heard anything? Has Ma been saying anything?

LUCY.

[*Puzzled.*] What about, Hat?

HAT.

About the window—that's what it was put there for—on the west side—so's it would face the barns—Ma wanted a window on the other side, there to the South—so's more light would come in—but Pa thought a window ought to be on the barn side—and Ma used to want another one cut in—over there—that was a long time ago, you know—when they were first married—and when we were all small—I can just remember—Ma wasn't feeling well that summer—Charley was born soon after harvest—and that was the last time we've had a hired girl till now, come to think of it! And Ma she used to brood, kind of, about that window—and Pa he promised

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

to put it in after thrashing—and for some reason it didn't get done—Oh, I know—cold weather came on early that year and Pa said he couldn't have the whole side of the kitchen torn out in cold weather—and after that Ma never said no more about it, and everybody forgot it—but now lately, since she ain't been feeling like herself, Ma's took to talking about it again. Ain't that queer? At least she said something to Charley—Ma sometimes talks more to Charley. [*There is a step outside. HAT springs up.*] Good Lord—and dinner not on! [*With relief.*] Oh, it's only Charley. [*Enter CHARLEY. He is a slight, fair-haired boy.*] Lordy, Charley, you scared me! I thought it was Pa or Hank.

CHARLEY.

No, it's only me. [*Hanging up his hat.*] If you haven't dinner ready, it don't matter; bring on anything you've got.

HAT.

[*Ruefully.*] I'm afraid you'll get the best of the biscuits, Charley. They're just right now. Are Pa and Hank going to be late?

CHARLEY.

Yes, Pa sent me in ahead, so's I could come back and take the binder. Darn the man that invented motor-driven machinery, I say. [*He smiles shyly at Lucy.*] No rest for the weary any more—we used to lay off at noon for the sake of the horses.

HAT.

Well, here you are, anyway—eat and be quick

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

about it, if Pa's waiting. It's a wonder you wouldn't speak to Lucy.

CHARLEY.

[*Shyly.*] Hello, Lucy.

LUCY.

[*Smiling.*] Hello, Charley.

HAT.

No wonder you never get along with the girls!

CHARLEY.

[*Amused.*] No wonder. Where's Ma?

HAT.

I don't know, Charley. I don't know what's come over Ma. She ain't been near the kitchen this morning.

LUCY.

She's out in the front—or she was a half hour ago—fussing over that little patch of flowers.

CHARLEY.

Call her in, Hat. Has she had any dinner? I'll go and see.

HAT.

Oh, set down and eat, Charley—if Pa wants you back, you'll have to go. I'll go out and see to Ma.

LUCY.

It's queer your Ma planting a flower garden this year—you never had one before.

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

HAT.

Oh, that was Charley's work—he spaded it up and fixed it for her.

LUCY.

Oh, did you do it, Charley?

*[There is respect in her voice—she appears to be regarding CHARLEY with new interest.]*

CHARLEY.

She seemed to hanker for it—Ma hasn't been well.

HAT.

Lucy, didn't we ever tell you that queer thing about Ma?

CHARLEY.

Don't, Hat.

HAT.

Oh, it's all right, just to Lucy. You know last Spring Ma put in the garden like she always does—and Charley was busy with the spring plowing and didn't have time to help her—and when things began coming up there was flower seed all scattered around among the vegetables! I found the empty seed packets that she'd hid—hollyhock and zinnia and petunia! Just think! Pa had Hank plow it out and put in late cabbages—and then Charley spaded up that little corner for her—and Doc Harney advised Pa not to interfere but let her do what she wants till she feels better again. Her stummick seems all upset—she don't relish her food.

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

CHARLEY.

Don't talk, Hat—go out and see where she is—or I'll go—I've had all I want.

HAT.

No, I'll go.

[MRS. STOCKMAN comes in through the screen door.]

CHARLEY.

Oh, there she is—well, Ma —— [Starts up from his chair. MRS. STOCKMAN drifts aimlessly across the room, taking no notice of any one. She stops and looks at the blank wall—puts her hand to her head nervously—sinks into the chair that CHARLEY pulls out for her at the table.] You're just in time to have some dinner with me, Ma.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

[Listlessly.] I don't seem to want anything. What you got for dinner, Hat? Has your Pa come in yet?

HAT.

No, he's coming later. Set up and eat, Ma. We got potatoes and salt pork and biscuits—the bread give out.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

I suppose I should have baked a batch—I don't seem able to remember ——

HAT.

I'm going to bake this afternoon—do set up and eat, Ma,

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

CHARLEY.

Do come on, Ma, have some dinner with us.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

[*Irritably.*] I don't want any ——

HAT.

But you're never going to get your strength back, Ma, if you don't eat.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

But I don't want anything—seems as if I couldn't—nothing has any taste any more.

HAT.

Ma, Lucy and I picked up the windfalls yesterday—we thought we'd do 'em up into pickles—do you think that would be nice? Or maybe apple butter—which do you think?

MRS. STOCKMAN.

I don't know—I don't care—throw 'em out if you want.

HAT.

Why, Ma!

MRS. STOCKMAN.

Has your Pa had his dinner?

CHARLEY.

[*Quickly.*] No, Ma, he's coming in soon's I go back.

HAT.

You better be going, too, Charley.

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

MRS. STOCKMAN.

This kitchen seems awfully hot—some way I don't seem able to stand the heat—guess I'll go lie down.

HAT.

Yes, do, Ma. And after a while I'll fix you a cup of tea and toast you a piece of bread. Shall I?

MRS. STOCKMAN.

[*Crossing the room.*] No, thank you, Harriet. I don't think I care for anything.

[*She leaves by the door at the left. CHARLEY sits staring at his plate. LUCY who has kept in the background, looks curiously from HAT to CHARLEY.*]

HAT.

[*Explosively.*] Did you hear that? It's the second time lately—and she ain't called me that since I was a little girl—she always used to call me Harriet then—till Pa and Joe and everybody took to saying Hat. Don't you think it queer? [*Quickly changing her tone.*] But Ma ain't been feeling well—you can see how it is—she won't eat.

CHARLEY.

Go in and see if she's comfortable, Hat.

HAT.

Well, all right—but I wish she'd eat. Lucy, keep a watch for Pa and Hank, will you?

[*HAT follows her mother. CHARLEY still sits looking at his plate. LUCY looks at CHARLEY.*]

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

CHARLEY.

[*Suddenly—speaking with great earnestness.*] Lucy! You're a stranger—you're outside the family—what do you think about Ma?

LUCY.

[*Slowly—choosing her words.*] Well—I think your Ma's all tired out—and run down, Charley. And she's always worked hard—and this kitchen is hot—and—not very pleasant—Charley, what about the window?

CHARLEY.

[*Startled.*] The window? Has she said anything to you?

LUCY.

No, she hasn't—said anything. But, Hat was just telling me ——

[*She stops and looks at the blank wall.*]

CHARLEY.

Yes, she used to want it, they say—I don't remember—and lately she's begun to talk about it—Lucy, [*In agony.*] tell me honestly—have you noticed anything queer about Ma?

LUCY.

Charley, I'll tell you just one thing—I didn't understand it till after what Hat told me—I came in here one day—and your Ma was here alone—and she was standing looking at that wall, Charley—just looking at it—and still not seeming to look *at* it either—but through it—as though she was seeing 'way off down the valley the way you can from that

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

side of the house—and when she turned around she was smiling—and that seemed strange in your Ma, you know—and she seemed like she was talking to herself—and then she went out of the room and didn't seem to see me at all—and I was right there close.

[CHARLEY's head has sunk down into his hands—he gets up suddenly.]

CHARLEY.

Damn it all! Damn the whole thing! It's enough to drive anybody —— [*He stops short on the word he won't say.*] Work—work—work! Man, woman and beast—no rest for anybody but the horses—[*With a wry smile.*] and now with tractors not that—all to get on—to get on! And where do they get to? Them that's built for it can stand it. But there's some that can't—and I can't and I won't. [*Calming down.*] Don't you tell anybody, Lucy, but I'm going to quit it.

LUCY.

You going to the city, Charley?

CHARLEY.

No, I'd be no good in the city. I don't mean I want to quit farming—I like farming—but I want to do it in my own way—Ma wanting that little patch of flowers showed me what's the matter with me—I'm going to get a little patch of ground somewhere—did you ever hear of a book called “Three Acres and Liberty”? I got it from the library in town—“That's the idea,” I says to myself—five hundred acres—or three hundred acres is slavery—

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

but about forty acres or sixty would be liberty—just a nice little piece of land somewhere where I can tickle the ground and make it grow—and a few cows—and pigs ——

LUCY.

[*Laughing.*] And you batching it all by your lonesome—oh, Charley!

CHARLEY.

[*Seriously.*] No, Lucy, that's the best part of my scheme—I'm going to take Ma with me—I think she'd like it—and Hat can manage here.

LUCY.

[*Earnestly.*] You're a good boy, Charley. I guess you've always been pretty good to your Ma.

CHARLEY.

No, I haven't, Lucy—I've been just like the rest of them—I thought she liked to work—and I let her do it and never made it easier. And I thought I was different from the rest because I liked to read and know what's going on, and now I know that she does too,—only she never had the time. And she likes flowers and pretty things—only she never had the time.

[*Unseen by the others HANK enters by the screen door—he humorously tickles the back of LUCY's neck. LUCY squirms, ducks and slips away when he makes a feint to catch her. She throws HANK a look that may mean detestation and again may mean admiration, for HANK is handsome in a brutal, hulking sort of way.*

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

HANK.

Got one on you that time, Luce! Where's Hat? Rustle me some dinner somebody. [*Throws his hat on a chair, drops into a place at the table, spears a biscuit with his fork.*] Hustle back to work, kid, the old man's waiting. [CHARLEY has taken down his hat, but he lingers. He seems to want to say something.] Well, Luce! We going to that dance Saturday night?

LUCY.

Don't call me that!

HANK.

Huh? What?

LUCY.

Luce! If you speak to me at all, use my name.

HANK.

[*With a big laugh.*] Little bit huffy, ain't you? All right, Lu-cee—will you honor me with a cup of caw-fee? [LUCY brings it—HANK makes a rough snatch at her hand—LUCY evades him.] Well, you ain't answered my question yet. We going to that dance?

LUCY.

It's too hot to dance—and I think I'll go over home and see the folks.

HANK.

Oh, you will, will you? Seem to have been changing your mind. And how'll you get there—it's a long walk.

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

LUCY.

[*A challenging eye on CHARLEY.*] Charley's going to drive me over. [CHARLEY grins.]

HANK.

Oh, he is, is he? I have first claim on the machine.

CHARLEY.

[*Laughing.*] Oh, that's all right. I still prefer Old Prince. I get enough of motors driving the darn tractor.

LUCY.

Besides, Charley's promised to take me around by the bluff road where a machine couldn't go.

CHARLEY.

[*Playing up.*] Yes, Lucy was just saying she wanted to get that view from the top.

HANK.

Well, we'll see what we'll see! Get back to your work, kid!

HAT.

[*Entering—seats herself disconsolately.*] I don't know what to think! She don't take no interest in anything—why, she don't take no interest in the work! I ast her just now what she thought we'd better plan on for thrashers this year, and she said she didn't care whether they had anything or not! She said she didn't care!

HANK.

Who's that—Ma? Ah, she'll be all right when

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

she picks up a bit and gets her appetite back. Say, kid, if you don't get back to your machine ——

CHARLEY.

I'm going—but there's something I want to say to you folks first—I went to see Doc Harney last night.

HAT.

Did he give you anything for Ma to take?

HANK.

If Doc Harney knew his business he'd give her something before this that would have set her up.

CHARLEY.

He said medicine wouldn't help—but he's coming out to see her—maybe to-day—and he's bringing another doctor with him—a great specialist.

HAT.

Why Ma ain't so bad as that—she don't need no operation or anything!

HANK.

Stummick—that's what it is—if she'd only eat.

LUCY.

What kind of a specialist, Charley?

CHARLEY.

[*Bringing the word out carefully.*] Doc Harney called him an alienist.

[*Only LUCY takes in the meaning of the word.*]

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

HANK.

What kind is that, a stummick specialist? That's what Ma needs.

CHARLEY.

[*To LUCY.*] Call me, Lucy, will you, if Doc telephones? Give the dinner bell a couple of taps.

LUCY.

I will, Charley.

[*CHARLEY goes out.*]

HANK.

Well, Lu-cee, so you think it's too hot to dance? You ain't thought that any other Saturday night this summer. [*He holds his cup out—she takes it.*]

LUCY.

[*Pouring the coffee.*] Well, maybe I hadn't been working so hard.

HANK.

[*Guffawing.*] Working! You girls make me tired—two of you—I'm darned if I know what you do with yourselves all day. You don't even have to carry in your water.

LUCY.

[*Spitefully.*] That's one thing I can't understand about this place—how you come to have running water in the kitchen.

HAT.

Well, Pa figured it wouldn't cost very much more after he got it piped into the barn.

[*Enter Pa—MR. STOCKMAN—he goes straight to the telephone—he is a short,*

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## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

*stocky man, with an intent "set" expression—he rings vigorously and takes down the receiver.*

MR. STOCKMAN.

[*Over his shoulder.*] Schofield ain't telephoned?

HAT.

No, Pa.

MR. STOCKMAN.

[*Telephoning.*] Hello—hello, is that you, Schofield?—Well, what about the binder twine? Huh? Well, my God, man, what do you expect? Do you think I can wait a week?—I sent a man in last night—You said you'd send it out parcels post this morning! Huh? Well, see here now—if it comes this afternoon you 'phone me—well, next year I'll get all my binder twine from Sears-Roebuck! You hear?  
[*Slams up the receiver.*]

HANK.

That's what's the matter with him, Pa. He knows you ordered your supply from Chicago direct, and now you're running short he won't accommodate you.

MR. STOCKMAN.

Next Spring, I'll show him! He won't get any of my trade. What's he there for but to accommodate! Better be getting back, Hank. There's a machine idle. [*HAT in the meantime is efficiently waiting on her father, bringing him fresh biscuits, while LUCY pours his coffee. Telephone rings.*] There! See if that's Schofield.

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## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

HANK.

'Twasn't our ring—that was Delmar's—two longs and a short.

LUCY.

[*Breathlessly.*] No, it wasn't—'Twas a short, a long and a short.

HAT.

Doc Harney, I'll bet. [*Answering the 'phone.*] Hello—yes—Oh, yes, Doc. [MR. STOCKMAN, *who has been listening, resumes his dinner.*] Yes, Doc, that's what Charley said—yes, all right—but not tell her, you say?—All right—Good-bye.

[*Hangs up.*]

HANK.

Doc's coming out, is he? Well, that's good. Time he was doing something. Well, so long, Luce—Lu-cee. [*Exit.*]

HAT.

Pa, Doc Harney's coming out to see Ma.

MR. STOCKMAN.

That so? I thought Charley went to see him to get some medicine for her.

[HAT *sits down at the table facing her father.*]

HAT.

Doc didn't seem to think medicine would help her. Pa, he's bringing another doctor out to see her—a great specialist.

MR. STOCKMAN.

What's that? Who told him to, I'd like to know.

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

HAT.

Nobody, Pa. He just did it himself—you know how Doc Harney is.

MR. STOCKMAN.

Well, then, by George, he can foot the specialist's bill. [Disturbed.] He don't really think there's anything wrong with Ma, does he?

HAT.

Well, Doc didn't seem to think there was anything much he could do for her himself. He says she's run down—overworked.

MR. STOCKMAN.

Why, your Ma ain't overworked—she ain't done much of anything since haying—and now since she ain't been feeling just right she ain't done nothing at all—and didn't I get her a hired girl? What more does he expect?

[LUCY, at this reference to herself, blows an impudent kiss toward the back of his head and goes outdoors.]

HAT.

But Doc seems to think Ma needs a change and a rest or something. He said we ought to humor her—like letting her fuss around that little flower bed.

MR. STOCKMAN.

But your Ma's always been humored—I never interfered with her work—and she ain't never had to help in the field—she's only had her housework. Why, she ain't even had to milk since the boys got big enough!

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

HAT.

I know, Pa, Ma ain't had it hard like some women.

MR. STOCKMAN.

What's this here specialist coming out for? [*Alarmed.*] Your Ma don't need no operation, does she?

HAT.

No, not's I know of—and I forget just what Charley did call the man—some word Doc used—Hank thought it must mean a stummick specialist.

MR. STOCKMAN.

Well, I guess that's what your Ma needs all right. Her appetite's been gone for some time.

HAT.

I know, Pa. And then too, she seems to be kind of low in her mind—kind of brooding—and she seems to be thinking about that window.

MR. STOCKMAN.

Window?

HAT.

Yes, that window she wanted cut in over there—a long time ago.

MR. STOCKMAN.

[*Turning to look at the wall.*] But—why—why—your Ma ain't thought about that—why she ain't thought about that—why she's forgotten all about that these twenty years back—she ain't got that on her mind now!

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

HAT.

Yes, she does seem to have, Pa. It seems kind of to have come back to her.

MR. STOCKMAN.

But, my God, she ain't said anything about that since the year I bought that north eighty—Charley was born that fall, I remember.

HAT.

She seems to have it on her mind, though.

MR. STOCKMAN.

[*Defensively.*] But I couldn't do it that year—I didn't have any help—and it was harvest—and then fall come on so early—and anyway, she forgot all about it afterwards.

HAT.

Well. I guess when she gets to feeling better again and her appetite picks up, she'll stop fussing about it. [*Rising.*] Doc said he was starting and would be out in about half an hour—I guess I'll just go and see how Ma' is—Doc said not to tell her, but maybe I could just get her to brush up her hair. You got everything you want, Pa?

MR. STOCKMAN.

[*Shortly.*] Yes.

[*He pushes back his plate, and after HAT has gone, he sits staring dumbly before him—then he turns and looks at the blank wall—he stares at it—and rises, pushes his chair back, and goes over to the wall—surveys it—tries it with his knuckles,*

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

*sounding out the joists—stands off again and surveys it—then measures off a space between his hands—picks up his hat and goes out. MRS. STOCKMAN enters by the other door. As before, she has the air of drifting about aimlessly. She stands and looks at the wall as her husband has done—then she sinks forlornly into a chair, brushing her hand across her eyes. HAT bustles into the room.*

HAT.

Now, here, Ma, I thought maybe you'd like to put on this clean white apron.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

But why, Harriet?

HAT.

Ma, what makes you call me that?

MRS. STOCKMAN.

Call you what, Harriet?

HAT.

That! Everybody's called me Hat for so long.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

[*Absently.*] Harriet—Henry—Charles. [*With distaste.*] Hat—Hank—Charley—[*Meditatively.*] Charley's kind of nice, though. [*Pulling herself together.*] What were you saying, Hat?

HAT.

[*With a queer look at her mother.*] Nothing, Ma, just that I thought you'd feel better if you

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

were fussed up a little bit. Here, put this white apron on.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

Oh, all right, if you want. I suppose these things got to be picked up.

*[Nodding distastefully at the table.]*

HAT.

Oh, that's all right, Ma. I'll do that in a jiffy.

*[Begins to rattle the dishes together—carries them to the sink—looking out of the window at times.]*

MRS. STOCKMAN.

*[Listlessly.]* Has your Pa had his dinner?

HAT.

Yes, Ma, they've all et and gone.

*[An auto horn sounds outside — HAT snatches off the cloth and pushes the table back—she makes little jabs at chairs, etc. Enter CHARLEY, holding the door open for DOC HARNEY and THE GREAT SPECIALIST.]*

CHARLEY.

Here's Doc Harney come to see you, Ma.

*[LUCY slips into the room after them. Doc HARNEY is a country doctor bordering on middle age. He is careless in his dress, good natured, kind, homely, dependable. He has the tenderness that comes to a man who has brought many children into the world in lonely farmhouses and eased many tired women out of it—and with it the*

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

*assurance of a man who is used to being obeyed. THE GREAT SPECIALIST is a young man—not tall—but firm-set and straight,—a strong, sensitive face—immaculate in dress and person,—with an air of trim distinction that contrasts with Doc HARNEY's disregard in such matters.*

DOC HARNEY.

Well, Mrs. Stockman, how goes it? How are you, Hat? [*Nodding to her.*] How's your mother been behaving?

*[All the while shaking hands with Mrs. STOCKMAN, who is limp and indifferent.]*

MRS. STOCKMAN.

Oh, I don't know as I'm any different, Doctor—trouble seems to be there's nothing the matter with me.

DOC HARNEY.

And here's a friend of mine, Mrs. Stockman, come down to spend a few days—I'm showing him the country—Mrs. Stockman,—Dr. Sedgwick.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

*[Somewhat shyly.]* How do you do. I'm pleased to meet you.

THE GREAT SPECIALIST.

*[Taking her hand.]* And it's very beautiful country, Mrs. Stockman. You are fortunate to live in it.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

*[Uncertainly.]* It is pretty—yes—it is pretty—

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

if you happen to like it—I'm prairie born myself, and I like open country—still this is pretty—where you can look down the valley.

THE GREAT SPECIALIST.

Yes, you mean the view from the turn of the road—just back aways—I noticed that—you look off down the valley—with the hills like big gate posts.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

[*Eagerly.*] Yes, that's what I mean! Down that way to the South—you can see so far—when I first came here to live and was homesick—and felt so shut in—I used to go outside and look and look—and it'd seem's if I was looking all the way down towards home—as if through a gate—like you said—opening out on the prairie—that's the view we get from our South window, you see!

[*She is standing with her back to the blank wall. At this astounding statement the others turn involuntarily to look at it.*]

THE GREAT SPECIALIST.

[*Gravely.*] Oh, yes—from your South window.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

Yes, that's why we had the window cut in—for that and to get the sunlight. Sit down, Doctor. Here, sit where you can face it.

[*He takes the chair she offers, facing the wall. She sits opposite. The others group themselves in the background. A curious change has come over MRS. STOCKMAN. She is interested, eager, alert.*]

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

### THE GREAT SPECIALIST.

So you're from the prairies—tell me about it.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

Yes, I was born in Illinois—then when I was about ten, our folks moved to Iowa.—And then Pa thought he'd try Nebraska—and afterwards he went down to Oklahoma—and finally he came back to Illinois—and then I met Mr. Stockman and came up here to live—it was awfully different, you see—with hills all around.

### THE GREAT SPECIALIST

Queer, isn't it—hill-born people find it lonesome on the prairies.

MRS. STOCKMAN.

Isn't it queer? Joseph, my oldest son, once thought of locating in North Dakota—but he couldn't stand it there—just couldn't stand it! It was so lonesome. He said there was nothing to see! Why, I say there's nothing to do but see! [*With a little laugh.*] It is queer, isn't it?

### THE GREAT SPECIALIST.

Isn't it? But you learned to like them after a while—the hills, didn't you?

MRS. STOCKMAN.

Yes—I s'pose I did—in a way. Anyway, I just told myself I had to like them. I'll never forget the day we drove up here—the railroad wasn't in then and we had to drive forty miles—and I kept saying to myself: Isn't it pretty country! How pretty the hills are—how soft and green the trees look on the

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

slopes—almost as if you could lie down on the tops of them like on a bed! What fun it's going to be climbing up the rocks! And all the time I seemed to feel them closing in, closing in around me! And all the while Mr. Stockman—my husband, we were just married—kept pointing out how rich the soil was in the valley bottoms—and I kept saying, Yes! Yes! And thinking to myself it was going to be wonderful to live here—and when we come to that turn in the road you spoke of and looked back, it really seemed true! And I said: Why, this isn't so bad—this is beautiful! And then we came on into the house—into this kitchen. [*With a gesture.*] Shut in! I just wanted to sit down in the middle of it—and cry—and me just married too and going to be so awfully happy! But there was only the one window then—the one over there—and the room was dark—and even when I looked out of the window, there I was smack up against the hill! Nothing at all to see! And then after a time my husband built the big barn and I couldn't see the hill—nothing but the red barn! Why, honestly, doctor, would you believe me, there were times when I thought I'd go crazy! Especially when the children were little—I remember that summer before Charley was born—that was a hard summer—my husband was awfully busy —

[*She has begun to brood again.*]

### THE GREAT SPECIALIST.

And then afterwards?

MRS. STOCKMAN.

Oh yes, afterwards—afterwards we did get the window cut in of course—but it was a long time.

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

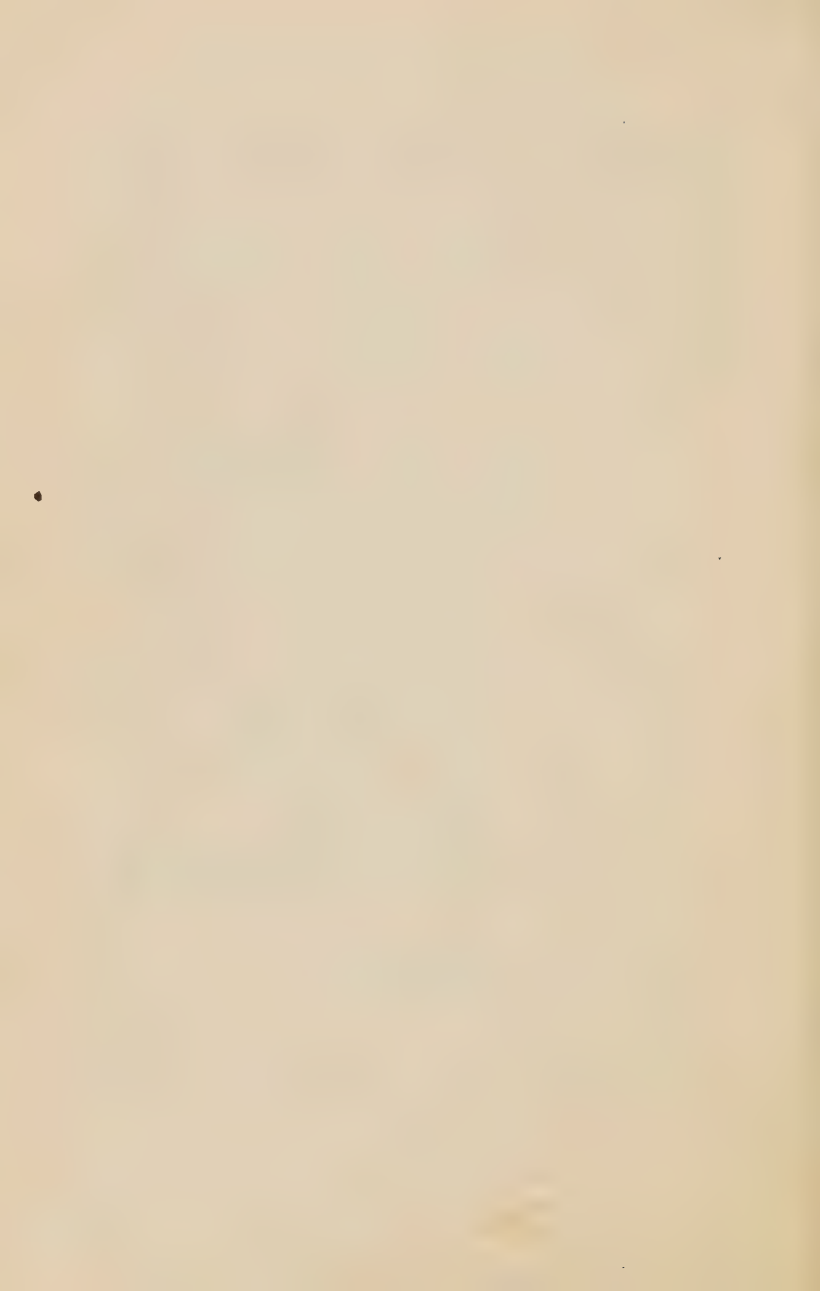
Once my husband told me he had a surprise for me—he was going to have something done to the house—workmen were coming out from town. And I said to myself: The window! At last the window—with the sun pouring in! And do you know what it was? It was the sink—with water piped into the house! Of course that was all right—and awfully nice and there's a lot of farms don't have it, and it does make the work easier—but I didn't mind the work! I wouldn't 'a' cared how much work there was—I would 'a' gone without a kitchen sink forever if I could have just had a little sunlight! [*Dropping her voice.*] Doctor! I'm going to tell you something I ain't ever told anybody before—There were times, before we had the window, when I used to think it was there! When it wasn't! It wasn't there at all!—only that awful wall! I'd dream about it—and I'd think about it when I was in the other parts of the house, making up beds or sweeping—I'd think about a south window in the kitchen, and how bright and pleasant it would be—and how I'd have white curtains and flowers in the winter—red geraniums in bloom—and a Christmas cactus like we used to have at home—and a fuchsia—the only window in this house that's fit for plants is in the spare room where it's too cold—Well, I used to think that so hard and imagine about it in my mind until I'd believe it! Then I'd come out here—and it wouldn't be so! And it would be just like a shock to me—and I couldn't believe it. And there's been times when I've gone up to that wall and hit it with my fist—and then I'd say to myself: Now, don't be so foolish—anybody'd think you were going

## A WINDOW TO THE SOUTH

crazy! And then after a while I'd get to imagining again—about the geraniums and the white curtains and the view down the valley. I always set my jelly glasses there in the sun—they look so pretty with the sunlight shining through them—don't you think so? A long row of them across the window sill ——  
[*Turning in her chair as she speaks.*] Oh! Oh!  
[*Rising uncertainly.*] What have I been saying? What—it isn't there—it isn't there at all—and it was all so pretty with the jelly glasses—Oh ——

[*With an inarticulate moan she covers her face with her hands—shaken with sobs. HAT would go to her mother, but Doc HARNEY restrains her. LUCY has slipped her hand into CHARLEY'S. THE GREAT SPECIALIST steps up to the broken woman—very gently and surely he draws her hands away from her eyes. She looks up into his face piteously. Just at this moment MR. STOCKMAN enters, the screen door slamming behind him. He carries a T-square and a small kit of carpenter's tools. He starts at sight of the group, brings himself up sharply and stands looking helplessly at the tableau—for the moment his is the most tragic figure among them.*

## CURTAIN



## THE LEAN YEARS

## CHARACTERS

THOMAS B. CARSON.

ELIZABETH CARSON.

LETTY.

RALPH.

## THE LEAN YEARS

---

SCENE.—*The front porch of a prosperous farmhouse, somewhere west of the Mississippi. Ordinary articles of porch furniture are all the stage properties required.*

TIME.—*The time of the play is the present, but at an important point in the action the curtain will descend suddenly and the scene will "cut-back," as they say in the Movies, to the eighteen-nineties.*

*As the curtain goes up, THOMAS B. CARSON is discovered sitting in one of the comfortable porch chairs. He is holding a paper which he has been reading. MRS. CARSON sits near him with some darning in her lap. LETTY lolls in a hammock at the end of the porch. RALPH is pacing up and down, his hands in the pockets of his white flannel trousers. RALPH is a good looking young man, ruddy and robust but a little inclined to be dressy. THOMAS B. CARSON is looking at his son with a twinkle in his eye.*

RALPH.

[*Continuing a discourse.*] I'm sick of it! All the fellows are making fun of me—riding 'round in that little tin Lizzie! "Say," Bill Nelson says to me the other night in town, "heard the last joke about a Ford?" "No," I says, biting like a sucker. "No," he says, "and you won't hear the last one for some

## THE LEAN YEARS

time to come!" Gosh! And the fellows yelled! Just because I have to drive that darn little mosquito while all the rest of the bunch have decent cars! Makes me sick!

*[His father grins; his mother looks worried.]*

LETTY.

*[Impetuously, sitting up in the hammock.]* 'Tisn't as if we couldn't afford it. If the Nelsons can have a Packard and the Andersons a Hudson, and the Shanes —

T. B. CARSON.

*[Chuckling.]* Old Jim Shane comes 'round to me last fall with a long face—wants his note renewed. "You know," he says, "that hail storm last summer pretty near did for my corn—and wheat taking the slump it did hit me hard—and anyway wheat raising ain't what it used to be," he says. And I, of course, easy mark that I am, I says, "Well, Jim, I guess that's all right—let it run till you're good and ready." Kind o' pleased with myself, you know, doing an old neighbor a good turn—felt pleased about it all winter, thinking Jim's mind would be easy. And, by jinks, here this spring, out come the young Shanes in a new six-cylinder buzz-wagon! No, son, I guess you can rattle around in the Ford a while longer. We ain't going out of our way to advertise that we're in the Cadillac class.

RALPH.

Oh, gosh, Dad!

MRS. CARSON.

*[Soothingly.]* Now, Ralph, your father knows

## THE LEAN YEARS

best. Besides, you young people have all the luxuries now that are good for you. And with Letty going away to study music it will be all the expense ——

LETTY.

[*Eagerly.*] That's just it. That's why I am so keen on Ralph's having his new car. Now that I'm going to Chicago at last—to have what I've dreamed of all my life—and Ralph is to stay here on the farm ——

T. B. CARSON.

Humph! Not to mention that Ralph is rather a lucky youngster to have a farm like this to stay on!

LETTY.

Oh, yes, of course, I understand that. Ralph is lucky—in a way. This is a good farm—not quite like starting out all new for himself.

T. B. CARSON.

[*Sarcastically.*] Not quite!

LETTY.

[*Continuing.*] And if Ralph wants to follow farming as a profession, it's all right—still, it isn't like going out into the world. If young people are to stay on the farm these days there must be compensations—and provision for recreation.

[*She speaks with the air of one who is quoting things heard or read.*]

RALPH.

Oh, gosh, Sis. I'm not asking anybody to pity me! All I'm asking ——

## THE LEAN YEARS

T. B. CARSON.

All you're asking is to be allowed to cut more of a dash along the highway than the other young chaps.

RALPH.

Well, and what of it? Why shouldn't I have a good time? Darn it all, there's something in what Sis says. She has a good time, going off to Chicago with nothing to do but rattle the piano for a few hours a day!

LETTY.

Ralph! I wish you wouldn't speak that way. You don't at all understand what my music means to me.

MRS. CARSON.

That's all right, Letty. That's just Ralph's way of talking.

LETTY.

[*Making a face at RALPH.*] Old smarty! He thinks it annoys me! [RALPH *grins.*] You don't think I'm selfish, do you, Mother?

MRS. CARSON.

[*Gently.*] Why, no, Letty, not that. You know how I've always wanted you to do well with your music, only ——

LETTY.

[*As though justifying herself.*] It isn't as if I would be throwing my time away. All my teachers have said that I have—talent. I don't know why I shouldn't say it! It isn't that I'm conceited,

## THE LEAN YEARS

I just know that with the right chance I can make something of myself. I know you don't understand——

MRS. CARSON.

Perhaps we understand.

LETTY.

I don't mean that you aren't sympathetic—but plodding along the way you have on the farm—and always contented with just that—you wouldn't understand this—this feeling I have that I must go on and make something of my life—that I must go forward—against all odds!

T. B. CARSON.

Well, I shouldn't wonder if your mother'd gone ahead against a few odds in her day, too. She's going ahead against that pile of socks now.

LETTY.

[*Impatiently.*] Oh, Father!

[*She throws herself back in the hammock, giving up the task as hopeless.*]

T. B. CARSON.

Well, that's all right, Letty. Nobody's grudging you your music lessons. But, by gum, when you come to think of it—Five dollars for a half hour's lesson—that's going some!

MRS. CARSON.

Yes, it's going to be quite an expense.

RALPH.

Look-a-here, you folks, you make me tired! Let

## THE LEAN YEARS

me tell you a few things. You act as if you had to economize! [*RALPH throws intense scorn into his word. The remainder of this speech, which is addressed directly to his father, should carry no suggestion of impertinence. The father's good-natured acceptance of it should add to this effect.*] You sold four car loads of hogs last fall—you put the money in the bank! You sold three car loads of young stock—you put the money in the bank! You sold your wheat—and not at slump prices, either—you held out for your own price, and you got it—and you put the money in the bank! Why, the dairy alone keeps up this place! The butter checks just about pay our running expenses—everything else is profit—and you put it in the bank.

T. B. CARSON.

Listen to Young America.

RALPH.

Yes, listen! You sit around and talk as if you had to scratch for a living—as if farming wasn't a paying proposition! Do you think I'd be taking it up if there wasn't something in it?

T. B. CARSON.

[*Dryly.*] There's still considerable hard work in it.

MRS. CARSON.

That's it. The children don't know what hard work means, so they don't appreciate the value of money.

LETTY.

Mother, you're always harping on that.

## THE LEAN YEARS

RALPH.

But you aren't denying that the work brings in money. It pays. Isn't everything I said true? Money to burn, and you stick it in the bank to earn interest! Why the deuce can't we live as we go along?

MRS. CARSON.

Now, Ralph, I won't have you talking to your father like that. We do live well. And you children have had advantages—you've had your schooling, and you've traveled, and you have your friends and dozens of interests that young people in my day didn't have—and your father and I don't begrudge you any of it. We want you to enjoy yourselves, but when you want to spend money for needless luxuries —

LETTY.

Mother, you make me fairly tired with your everlasting talk about economy! It isn't only in big things—like Ralph's car—it's everything! There you sit on this warm day and darn those old stockings—throw the whole lot away and buy new ones!

MRS. CARSON.

Letty! Throw away good stockings!

LETTY.

Oh, it isn't only the stockings—it's everything! You're always saving things. Why, I found you saving old newspapers—you said they came in handy for shelf papers and to line drawers—imagine, newspapers! And pieces of string! You're always

## THE LEAN YEARS

rolling them up in little balls! And you're always tickled, yes, honestly tickled, when you buy something two cents cheaper—you might think we were foreigners the way you economize on little things. And my dresses—you're always looking at them and telling me how you could *turn* them and fix them in this year's style. If there is anything I hate—Why, Mother, you make me just ashamed!

MRS. CARSON.

Why, Letty—Letty ——

T. B. CARSON.

[*Severely.*] See here, young lady, you've said about enough.

LETTY.

Well, I don't care, it is a disgrace—the way she is always squeezing pennies. Why, Mother, you're downright stingy!

MRS. CARSON.

[*Letting her darning ball roll to the floor and leaning forward to face her husband.*] Tom! [*In a sharp voice.*] Tom! Am I like that? Have I grown to be that kind of a person?

RALPH.

[*Trying to soothe his mother.*] It isn't as though we were poor.

MRS. CARSON.

[*Her eyes fixed on her husband's.*] It isn't as though we were—poor!

## THE LEAN YEARS

T. B. CARSON.

[*Repeating slowly.*] No—not as though we were—poor!

### QUICK CURTAIN

*It must be understood that the three short scenes that follow give memory pictures that are passing through the minds of two of the characters. If similar pictures could be shown from the minds of the others they would consist perhaps of long white roads and whirring wheels, or of expansive concert halls and rows of white and black keys—but those things are of the future; we are here concerned with the past.*

*The TOM and LIZZIE CARSON of the intervening scenes must be played by two other actors as nearly like T. B. CARSON and MRS. CARSON as is possible and consistent with the changes due to passing years.*

### SCENE I

SCENE.—*Interior of a small frontier shack. The board walls are unpapered. There is one window. The furnishings consist of one cook stove, newly blacked; one cupboard, made of two dry-goods boxes set one on top of the other—the shelves of same are covered with newspaper cut into crude scallops and fantastic patterns; one pine table; two pine kitchen chairs; one small cheap rocker. Enter TOM and LIZZIE CARSON. TOM carries two*

## THE LEAN YEARS

*canvas telescopes. LIZZIE precedes him into the room. Looks about her ecstatically.*

LIZZIE.

Oh, Tom! We're at home!

TOM.

*[Dropping the telescopes and looking about dubiously.]* It's a poor home to bring you to, Lizzie.

LIZZIE.

*[Examining everything.]* Oh, the darling cook stove! Tom, I'll bet you blacked that up just for me! I know you never kept it so bright and shining while you were batching! *[Taking off lid and peeking in.]* And the fire all laid ready to light! Tom, bring a match and let's light it quick. The first fire in our own house!

TOM.

Oh, come, Lizzie, take your coat off first.

*[Helps her awkwardly to remove the coat (vintage of 1890) which has a very tight waist and very big sleeves. But before the queer little hat that perches so absurdly on her head is removed, she spies the cupboard and darts over to that.]*

LIZZIE.

Oh, and the dish cupboard! You made it yourself! And the lovely shelf paper! Tom, don't tell me — *[With a sparkle of a laugh.]* Don't tell me that you cut those yourself!

## THE LEAN YEARS

TOM.

[*Proudly.*] I did! Yes, sir; I did. Say, I tell you I sat up nights working out that pattern. You know you fold it all up and then snip around with the shears—and till you open it out you don't know what you're going to get! I got some awfully queer looking ones before I worked out this one. It don't look so bad, does it, Liz?

LIZZIE.

Oh, Tommy! It's lovely—it's beautiful! [*With a little spring, she goes to his arms.*] Tom, I love everything in our home—because you made it, with your own hands—for me.

TOM.

[*His arms around her, one hand patting her shoulder.*] It's a pretty poor home to bring you to, old girl. It's not much like what you been used to back in Ohio—only two little rooms—when you been used to a parlor and everything.

LIZZIE.

But, Tom, this is *ours*! And I think we have lots of things—a cook stove, a cupboard and dishes—and a table—and two chairs—Oh, Tom, and that nice little rocker! Let me sit in it—I know you bought it for me.

[*She breaks away to sit in the little rocker, rocking herself so hard that the absurd little hat that is still perched on her head wobbles dangerously.*

## THE LEAN YEARS

TOM.

[*Admiring her.*] Lizzie, you'd look a lot more at home if you'd take your hat off.

LIZZIE.

[*Laughing.*] Oh, so I would. Help me find the pins, Tom.

[*Together they get the hat off, and Tom, for no reason at all, kisses her.*]

TOM.

Gosh, Lizzie, it looks good to see you here!

LIZZIE.

It's good to be here, Tom—in our own home, on our own farm! Tom, isn't it wonderful to own a whole farm—all by ourselves!

TOM.

Well, Lizzie, we don't exactly own it yet. There's that little matter of a mortgage to pay off.

LIZZIE.

[*Snapping her fingers.*] Pish! What's that! Why, we'll do that in no time, with good crops for a year or two. And in the meantime, think what fun we'll be having, living here all by ourselves. [*Jumping up.*] Now, tell me about the neighbors, Tom. Do we have any neighbors? [*Running to the window.*]

TOM.

[*Following.*] Well, you can't see from here, but we got neighbors all right. There's Shane's place only five miles down that way—nice folks they are—he's got a nice wife and two little boys. I'll take

## THE LEAN YEARS

you over to see them some day, Lizzie. It's only five miles—that's nothing out here—we don't count distance like you do back east.

LIZZIE.

[*Bravely.*] Five miles—why, that's nothing at all. We could drive over there in an hour most any day, couldn't we?

TOM.

Well—our team could pretty near do it in an hour. And then about the same distance down the other way there's some Swedes settled—but they're nice folks, Lizzie—even if they don't talk much English. And work—say, a fellow has to hustle to keep up with them!

LIZZIE.

We'll keep up all right!

TOM.

And awfully good-hearted folks—there's a Mrs. Nelson over there that's been sending me a batch of bread once in a while—say, she can cook.

LIZZIE.

Humph! Bet you've forgotten what good cooking is! But, Tom, it's time to get supper! Come on—let's light our fire! The first fire in our own home! [*Seizing his hand and speaking more seriously.*] You do think we'll get on, don't you, Tom? That we'll pay off the mortgage—and everything'll be all right?

TOM.

It's just got to be all right now you're here,

## THE LEAN YEARS

Lizzie. Come on, now light your fire. [*He leads her to the stove, opens the door, gives her a match.*] Here you are, Liz.

LIZZIE.

Tom, it will be an omen! Our first fire! If it burns well, and the chimney draws, and it doesn't smoke—it will mean we are going to succeed!—Here—you light it!

TOM.

No, I want you should, Lizzie. Our first fire!  
[*LIZZIE strikes the match, kneels slowly and reverently to apply it, TOM shielding her hands with his own.*]

## CURTAIN

## SCENE II

*Same as before, with a cradle added. The stage is somewhat dark, with a dull, yellowish light. LIZZIE kneels by the cradle, rocking it gently. TOM is pacing up and down, looking now and again out of the window. He looks disheveled. LIZZIE is wan and pale. The time is something over a year later.*

LIZZIE.

Don't you think we might try the door open again, Tom?

TOM.

[*Savagely.*] What's the use? It's hotter outside than in!

## THE LEAN YEARS

LIZZIE.

I know it, Tom, but it's so close. A little fresh air ——

TOM.

Fresh air! Fresh from a furnace! There! [*Flinging open the door.*] There's your fresh air! Feel it! [*Holding out his hand to the hot breeze.*]

LIZZIE.

[*Under her breath.*] Oh, my God, Tom—it's like a bake oven—and the dust, the dust—close the door. [*She adjusts a cheese-cloth canopy over the baby's cradle.*] There, there, mother's baby! Does the old dust settle down on her little face? [*Rocks the cradle gently, then rises and moves about the room. Runs her hand over the table.*] Tsut! Tsut! I can't stand it! [*Gets a duster from behind the stove and wipes off top of table and window sill.*] Tom, this window sill is hot—actually hot to my hands—and the walls—feel them, Tom!

TOM.

[*Who has thrown himself heavily in a chair.*] I know—my God—I know!

LIZZIE.

What do you suppose we're coming to? It isn't natural—this hot wind—hour after hour. They say Mrs. Shane's old mother thinks the end of the world is coming—I don't know as I blame her—maybe it is.

TOM.

[*Harshly.*] The end's come for us all right.

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## THE LEAN YEARS

LIZZIE.

Oh, Tom, maybe not. Maybe if it should blow up a rain ——

TOM.

Blow up a rain! That's what we've been saying for weeks. We said it last night—"If rain should come yet," we said, "even after all these weeks, it mightn't be too late." And off there in the west were the wind clouds—"It may blow up a rain," we said. Early this morning I heard the breeze stirring—"There she comes," I thinks—and by God, she came! A wind off the fires of hell! There! [*Goes to the door again and throws it open.*] Listen! Hear that rattle? That pitter-patter—like rain—like rain drops on the roof? Know what it is? It's the rattle of the corn—the nice, refreshing breeze blowing through our corn—burning it to a crisp! All the rain in heaven couldn't help us now!

[*Bangs the door and hurls himself into a chair by the table, burying his head in his arms—his shoulders heaving.*]

LIZZIE.

[*Brokenly.*] Tom—Tom—Tom! [*A cry from the cradle reaches her ears. She crosses to the cradle, removes the cheese-cloth, soothes the baby, murmuring.*] There—there, Mother's baby, Mother's precious little Letty—Mother knows how warm it is—there—there ——

TOM.

[*Lifting his head.*] Can't you just remember how it was back in Ohio, Liz?

## THE LEAN YEARS

LIZZIE.

Let's not think about that, Tom.

TOM.

Always so green, Liz. Even in late summer the pastures were green—and plenty of rain—never a dry spell like this—and never hot.

LIZZIE.

Well, sometimes a little warm, Tom.

TOM.

And always plenty of rain—nice cool rains every day or so.

LIZZIE.

Yes, it was lovely, Tom.

TOM.

And to think that we left it for this—this country that God forgot. Well, we've had enough of it! We've learned our lesson—we're going back!

LIZZIE.

[*Looking wistfully about.*] And leave our nice little home, Tom!

TOM.

Fine home it is—with nothing to live on!

LIZZIE.

There, there, Letty. Does the horrid dust bother you—there, there—Mother won't let it! Is it true, Tom, the Shanes are thinking of going back?

TOM.

Well, yes, I guess so—anyway, Jim will go if I do.

## THE LEAN YEARS

LIZZIE.

And if we stay?

TOM.

Well, I can't say ——

LIZZIE.

And the Nelsons, and the other Swedes?

TOM.

Well, I suppose the Swedes will stick—you see they've come across the ocean.

LIZZIE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] It would be rather a long way to go back—wouldn't it? And I suppose they'd feel rather sheepish,—and all their folks would say “I told you so—that country out there's no good—why didn't you listen to us and stay here at home—why couldn't you know when you were well off—with a good job clerking in the grocery store—now you can ask Uncle Amos to let you have your job back—and Lizzie can go back to the old folks ——”

TOM.

Lizzie, what you talking about?

LIZZIE.

About going back, Tom. Don't you just know what they'll say to us? Aunt Elvira and all of 'em! Tom, I *won't* go back! [*She brings her fists down on the edge of the cradle, disturbing the baby.*] There—there, baby. Mother's getting excited, but she didn't mean to disturb her precious!

## THE LEAN YEARS

TOM.

[*Who has been looking very steadily at LIZZIE.*] What do you reckon we're going to live on, Lizzie, if we stay?

LIZZIE.

Lord only knows, Tom. What will the Swedes live on?

TOM.

Lord knows, Liz—white beans, I guess. It's the only crop we've got this year.

LIZZIE.

Then we'll live on white beans! And next year, maybe—why, Tom, it just can't be like this every year! [*Suddenly—starting to her feet.*] Tom, the wind's gone down!

TOM.

[*Lifting his head.*] Why, so it has—or has it only shifted around to the other side? [*Rising.*

LIZZIE.

[*Quicker than he, darts to the window.*] Tom! That looks like a thunder cloud. [*Opens the door.*] It is, Tom! And the wind has changed—and it's cooler!

TOM.

[*Moving slowly towards the door.*] Too late for it to do any good now.

LIZZIE.

But it will be cooler and will settle the dust—and anyway, there's always next year. Tom, feel it—it's rain!

[*Holds out both her arms.*

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## THE LEAN YEARS

TOM.

Yes, there's next year ——

*[Throws an arm around his wife's shoulders and they stand together, lifting their faces to the oncoming rain.]*

### CURTAIN

### SCENE III

*Same as before, with an added touch or two to indicate slight prosperity, curtains at the window, perhaps. If possible have the cook stove moved out. The time is a late autumn afternoon some two or three years later. LIZZIE is moving about the room, looking now and then out of the window. Running to the door, she waves her hand and calls.*

LIZZIE.

Hoo-hoo! Are you coming in now or going to put up the team first? Oh, all right—that won't take long, will it? Supper's all ready. *[Exit through a door at the right—returns bearing a covered dish. Exit again R. TOM enters through the outer door—looks about him with a secretive air. LIZZIE looks in at the door.]* Hello, Tom.

TOM.

Hello, Liz. Kids asleep?

LIZZIE.

Yes, I gave them their supper early. They've played so hard to-day. Take your coat off and sit

## THE LEAN YEARS

down, Tom. I'll bring your coffee in a minute—I didn't want to make it till you came.

*[While talking she has gone back into the kitchen.]*

TOM.

No hurry, Liz.

*[He tiptoes about, again with that secretive air, takes a peep through the kitchen door, then makes a sudden bolt for the outer door—comes back in a moment pushing something before him—a sewing-machine.]*

LIZZIE.

*[Calling.]* You might sit down, Tom, and help yourself to the potatoes—I'll be in in just a moment.

TOM.

All right, Liz.

*[He pushes the machine back against the wall near the kitchen door, makes a dive for his chair and begins rattling the dishes.]*

LIZZIE.

*[Entering.]* Here's the coffee, Tom. I'm so sorry you had to wait.

TOM.

*[Genially.]* Oh, that's all right, Liz.

LIZZIE.

*[Sits down opposite him and pours his coffee.]*  
Now, tell me all about it, Tom.

## THE LEAN YEARS

TOM.

[*Quizzically.*] About what?

LIZZIE.

Oh, you know, Tom. Did you get a good price?

TOM.

[*Beaming.*] You bet I did, Liz.

LIZZIE.

Oh, Tom! As much as you expected?

TOM.

More!

LIZZIE.

[*Clasping her hands.*] Oh, Tom!

TOM.

Market had gone up two cents!

LIZZIE.

Oh, Tom! And you sold all the crop?

TOM.

Yep!

LIZZIE.

Oh, Tom! And you put the money in the bank!

TOM.

Yep!

LIZZIE.

Oh, Tom, isn't it *wonderful* to put money in the bank? Let's see the bank book, Tom, to see what it looks like! [Tom *hands over the book, which she looks at reverently.*] I can hardly believe it, and

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now we can make a payment on the mortgage. Isn't it glorious?

TOM.

It sure is.           *[Takes a hearty drink of coffee.]*

LIZZIE.

How's the coffee, Tom?

TOM.

Fine! You're a great cook, Liz.

LIZZIE.

How much do you think I paid for it, Tom?

TOM.

Good price—judging by the taste.

LIZZIE.

Tom, that's Arbuckle's nine cent coffee! Now, isn't it just as good as any twelve or even eighteen cent coffee you ever drank? I got this package to try, and now after this by buying three at a time, I can get a reduction ——

TOM.

Say, Liz, you are the girl to squeeze the pennies!

LIZZIE.

*[Rising—in mock indignation.]* Well, it's mighty lucky for you, Mr. Tom Carson, that you have a wife who knows how to squeeze the pennies! I'd like to know where you'd be if you hadn't. *[With a little curtsey, she turns and flings towards the kitchen, coming face to face with the machine. She*

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*stops.*] Why, Tom! [*She says under her breath.*]  
It's a sewing-machine!

[*Gazing at it mutely for a moment, she drops to her knees, her hands clasped. Then, burying her face in her hands, she sobs noiselessly.*

TOM.

[*Pushing back his chair and rising.*] Why, Lizzie—why, Lizzie, girl. What's the matter? Why, Lizzie, I thought you'd be kind o' pleased.

[*Raises her to her feet; she clings to his shoulder.*

LIZZIE.

Oh, I am, Tom. I am!

TOM.

But what you crying about!

LIZZIE.

Oh, Tom, because I'm so happy! [*Laughing and crying.*] Oh, Tom, I was never so happy in my life! [*Wiping her eyes and looking at the treasure.*] A sewing-machine. [*Breaking away from Tom, she goes over to examine it—takes off cover.*] How does it work? [*Turns wheel.*] Oh, I'm so glad the wheel goes forward. I can't abide a machine that starts backward—not but what I'd have been just as pleased to have one. Oh, Tom, you darling!

TOM.

Looks kind of nice, don't it, Liz? Sort of helps furnish the room.

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LIZZIE.

It looks lovely, Tom. And won't I have a good time using it, though? I'll make you a new shirt first thing, Tom. And I'll make some new little dresses for Lettie. It threads just like Mother's—*[She is still examining the machine—standing off to admire it.]* It does look nice, Tom—and just fills up the space left by the stove.

TOM.

Yea, that's what I thought, Liz, when we built the lean-to for the stove. I thinks to myself, "By jinks, if the crop turns out good this year, and we get a fair price, I'm going to get something nice for Lizzie." First, I thought of a sofa—one of those plush ones, you know—then it just came to me one day that a sewing-machine was the thing.

LIZZIE.

Oh, yes, Tom—there's nothing I'd rather have than a machine. And I can do so much with it. But, Tom, your supper's getting all cold—come and sit down and let me give you another cup of coffee.

TOM.

But, Lizzie, you aren't eating anything yourself.

LIZZIE.

Oh, I ate a bite with the children—besides, I'm too happy to eat. Tom, I know what I'm going to make first—a little suit for Ralphie—like one I saw a picture of in the *Ladies' World*—it was all in one piece, Tom—a plain waist and little panties, with a belt around—look, Tom *[She measures off on her*

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*own person.*—a child's romper, it was called—and looked awfully cute, and sensible, too—they say little boys are wearing them instead of kilts—they are putting little boys into trousers sooner than they used to—at three or four years—or even two, they say. 'Tom, wouldn't Ralphie look cute in little panties?

TOM.

[*Grinning.*] And what you going to make for yourself, Lizzie?

LIZZIE.

Oh, I'm all right. Maybe after a while, I'll make my blue dress over again.

TOM.

[*Rising slowly and coming around to his wife's chair.*] Well, the time's coming, old girl, when you won't have to make over your clothes.

LIZZIE.

Why, I don't mind, Tom. Besides, I think it's kind of interesting to see what you can do with old things.

TOM.

[*He stands behind his wife's chair, his hands on her shoulders. She reaches her own hands up to clasp his. Her chair is turned so that she faces the audience, and there is a far-away look in her eyes, as though she looked into the future.*] Just the same, the time's coming when there won't be any need—now that we've got a start we can stand a bad year once in a while—and then bad years are so rare

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out here. Oh, this is God's own country, Liz—not like back in Ohio, where you had to dig for everything you got. Yessir, Liz, some day we're going to be rich! And we're going to have things! And do you know, Liz, what I'm going to have first? I made up my mind to it while I was driving along to-day behind those old plugs! I'm going to have a driving horse! Yessir, a nice little roadster—just for driving—and a little runabout, with yellow wheels!—Hum—some speed we'll make along the highway, eh, Lizzie?

LIZZIE.

Oh, Tom, you are the greatest one to want to go—I don't mind plodding—and now that I have my new machine and the lean-to built on for the stove, I can't think of anything else I could possibly want—I feel so rich now! Unless—there's just one thing—Oh, I wonder if we could have it before Letty grows up! Tom—I want to have a cabinet organ, so's Letty can take music lessons—there's a teacher come to Millsville, they say, that gives a term of lessons, twenty for five dollars—Oh, Tom! Do you suppose we could ever afford it?

TOM.

I shouldn't wonder if we could afford it, old girl. Why, Lizzie, the time's coming when we can afford anything!

CURTAIN

*And then a return to the original scene.*

*The characters keep the positions they had when*

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*the curtain fell for the first intervening scene. T. B. CARSON and MRS. CARSON are looking at one another with fixed gaze. RALPH and LETTY appear to be puzzled.*

RALPH.

Well, say, come out of it!

T. B. CARSON.

Say, Lizzie, whatever became of that old sewing-machine—the one I brought home to you?

MRS. CARSON.

Why, Tom, how funny—I was just thinking about that, too. It's in the attic, Tom. I could never bear to part with it. Why, [*Turning to look at her son, running her eye over him from head to foot.*] I made Ralph's first little panties on that machine.

RALPH.

Well, what in the name of —— What's come over you? Here we sit, having a sensible conversation, and all of a sudden you two go off into a kind of a trance for five minutes or so, and then come back out of it and begin to talk about —— [*Looks down at his immaculate trousers.*] Oh, gosh!

MRS. CARSON.

Well, you did look cute in them. Didn't he, Tom? Wouldn't it have been nice, Tom, if there'd been kodaks in those days, so's we could have had pictures of the children?

T. B. CARSON.

[*Chuckling.*] Now, Liz, you know you would

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never have let me buy one. You were a great girl to save the pennies, Lizzie.

MRS. CARSON.

And wasn't it a lucky thing for you that I was?

T. B. CARSON.

Darn lucky. Liz, do you remember that hot wind?

LETTY.

Well, what started this anyway?

MRS. CARSON.

Why, I don't know—something Ralphie or one of you said set me to thinking of old times. Let's see, what were we talking about anyway? Oh, Ralph wanted something, didn't he?

T. B. CARSON.

Yes—a runabout.

MRS. CARSON.

With yellow wheels? [*They both laugh.*]

RALPH.

Well, I give up. [*He and LETTY exchange glances.*]

MRS. CARSON.

Whatever became of it, Tom?

TOM.

I gave it away to that young what's-his-name when he was getting his start. I believe they're still using it to take milk to factory. Pretty fine little cart that was—and, say, I never had a nicer little horse—remember that first Fourth of July

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celebration we went to?—passed everything on the road!

MRS. CARSON.

[*Looking from RALPH to his father.*] Tom! I don't know as we can blame Ralph—he comes by it naturally.

T. B. CARSON.

What?

MRS. CARSON.

His love for speed—the way he likes to *go*!

TOM.

[*Grinning.*] Well, what about Letty and her music lessons at five dollars a half hour?

MRS. CARSON.

Twenty lessons for five dollars, Tom.

[*They laugh again.*]

LETTY.

Well, really, I don't like to interrupt—but what has got into you two?

MRS. CARSON.

Why, we were just talking about your first music lessons, Letty. Don't you remember? Miss Casey used to come out from Millsville once a week to give you a lesson.

LETTY.

Oh, heavens, yes—on that funny old cabinet organ—don't you remember it had queer little knick-knacks on it—and little shelves where you put family

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portraits, and a vase with dried grasses and everlasting in it! Aren't those old things killing when you think about them?

T. B. CARSON.

[*With sarcastic emphasis.*] Quite killing.

MRS. CARSON.

We had a party, Tom, the night we brought it home—do you remember? And I chorded for you to play the mouth organ—and old Jim Larson brought his fiddle and we danced—do you remember ——

RALPH.

Well, say ——

T. B. CARSON.

[*Who has come around behind his wife's chair to take the position held at the end of the preceding scene.*] Those were great old times, Lizzie. What-ever became of ——

RALPH.

Well, say ——

T. B. CARSON.

What? Would you young folks mind running away—your mother and I have some things to talk about. [RALPH and LETTY rise, looking hurt.] And, by the way, there're a couple of new catalogs from Detroit in there on my desk—you might look 'em over and pick out what you want.

LETTY.

Oh, Father! Can Ralph have his car?

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T. B. CARSON.

Think we can afford it, Lizzie?

MRS. CARSON.

[*Laughing a little unsteadily.*] I guess maybe we can afford it now, Tom.

T. B. CARSON.

[*In imitation of RALPH.*] It isn't as though we were poor.

MRS. CARSON.

[*With slow emphasis and inner meaning—in her eyes the far-away look of one who sees into the past.*] No—it isn't as though we were—poor!

THE END













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